

## Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 245633

USUN NEW YORK FOR GLENNON/MC KEE

FOLLOWING REPEAT SANA 4025 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO JIDDA,  
CAIRO, AMMAN, ABU DHABI, MUSCAT, KUWAIT, TEHRAN, BEIRUT, TEL AVIV,  
TRIPOLI, TUNIS, RABAT, MANAMA, DOHA, BAGHDAD, MOGADISCIO, LONDON,  
SECDEF, COMIDEASTFOR, CINCEUR 12 OCT 77

QUOTE S E C R E T SANA 4025

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, YE

SUBJECT: CHIEF OF STATE ASSASSINATION IN YEMEN

REF: A) SANA 4019 B) SANA 4016

SUMMARY: WHILE IT IS IMPOSSIBLE AS OF NOW TO ASSIGN RE-  
SPONSIBILITY FOR ASSASSINATION OF YAR PRESIDENT HAMD  
LAST NIGHT, SOME SIGNS POINT TO SOUTH YEMEN. ANALYSIS OF  
EFFECTS OF KILLING MUST ALSO BE HIGHLY TENTATIVE.  
FOR MOMENT IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT TRANSITION TO  
HIS COLLEAGUE CHIEF OF STAFF AHMED AL-GHASHMI HAS BEEN  
SWIFT AND REASSURING. HOWEVER, LONGER TERM PROSPECTS FOR  
DETERIORATION OF INTERNAL POLITICS OF YEMEN ARE

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CLOUDED AND UNCERTAIN. MEANWHILE AMERICAN COMMUNITY  
REASSURED AND EMBASSY ORGANIZED FOR ANY EVENTUALITY.

1. KILLING OF POPULAR PRESIDENT HAS LEFT EVEN  
FATALISTIC YEMENIS STUNNED AND SHOCKED. FEW THEORIES  
ARE BEING ADVANCED. HOWEVER, HAMD WAS CLEARLY ON  
BRINK OF HIS GREATEST SUCCESS, COMPROMISE WITH TRIBES

ON MOST SENSITIVE QUESTIONS OF TERRITORY AND POWER. SAUDI ROLE IN THIS WAS CRUCIAL AND MAY WELL HAVE BEEN LINKED TO GO-AHEAD ON BOTH SIDES WITH F-5 DEAL. THIS WOULD CONSOLIDATE HAMDI'S POWER AND ALSO SECURE MOST OF SAUDI GOALS IN YEMEN. FEW THEORIES ARE BEING ADVANCED. WE HAVE RUN THROUGH VARIOUS POSSIBILITIES BELOW, IN WHAT APPEAR TO US TO BE ASCENDING ORDER OF LIKELIHOOD. WHERE YEMENI SOURCES ARE AVAILABLE, WE NOTE THE FACT.

2. FIRST, MOTIVE OF PERSONAL REVENGE IS ALWAYS POSSIBILITY. YAR AIR FORCE HAS CONDUCTED BOMBING MISSIONS AGAINST SEVERAL NORTHERN VILLAGES AND, IN LAST THREE WEEKS, STRUCK BACK AT SOUTHERN SHAYKH WHO APPARENTLY TRIED BLOCK FOREIGN ROAD CONSTRUCTION COMPANY WHICH HAD REACHED HIS PROPERTY ON WAY TO RADA AND BAYDA. SAHYKH, NAMED AL-DAHAB, FOUND HIMSELF SHORTLY CONFRONTED BY PARTY OF SOLDIERS FROM ABDALLAH AL-HAMDI'S AMALIQA BRIGADE STATIONED IN DHAMAR. SHOOT-OUT LEFT FOUR SOLDIERS DEAD. AMALIQA MOVED IN WITH LARGE FORCE, WHICH QUALIFIED EYEWITNESS ON ROAD DESCRIBED AS BATTALION. GROUND FORCES WERE SUPPORTED BY AIR STRIKES. DAHAB FLED TO ABDALLAH BIN HUSSEIN IN NORTH, AND HIS CASE BECAME INVOLVED IN MOST RECENT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN HAMDI AND HIS SHAYKHLY RIVAL. HAMDI WASN'T BUDGING ON CLAIMS OF WHO WAS RIGHT AND DESERVED COMPENSATION. ASSASSINATION COULD HAVE BEEN PRIVATE REVENGE TAKING, PERHAPS EVEN AIMED AT  
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ABDALLAH HAMDI MORE THAN PRESIDENT.

3. NO ONE HAS BACKED THIS THEORY LOCALLY, PARTLY BECAUSE YEMENIS ALWAYS SEE COMPLICATED POLITICAL CONSPIRACIES IN EVERY ACT EVEN WHEN THEY ACT FROM PURELY PERSONAL MOTIVES. HOWEVER, WE GIVE THEORY LITTLE CREDENCE.

4. SECOND THEORY IS THAT, SINCE CHIEF OF STAFF AL-GHASHMI PROFITTED -- HE IS NOW PRESIDENT -- HE MUST HAVE HAD HAND IN MURDER. ACCOUNTS HAVE REPEADLY CIRCULATED OF DISPUTES BETWEEN AL-GHASHMI AND PRESIDENT, PARTICULARLY ON QUESTION OF RELATIONS WITH SOUTH, WHICH PRESIDENT WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE VISITED IN DAY AS CHIEF OF STATE IN ATTENDANCE AT OCTOBER 14 NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS THERE. STORY THAT HAMDI LEFT HIS HOUSE WITHOUT BODYGUARD AND WAS GUNNED DOWN ON ROAD HAS BEEN ATTACKED AS UNLIKELY. WE HAVE HEARD RUMORS THA KILLING ACTUALLY TOOK PLACE IN GHASHMI'S HOUSE. ALTERNATIVELY, SUGGESTION HAS BEEN MADE THAT ATTACK HAD ALL THE MARKS OF INSIDE JOB, WITH GHASHMI SETTING IT UP. NO RPT NO YEMEN OFFICIAL WE HAVE TALKED TO HAS UTTERED ANY WORD OF GHASHMI EXCEPT SUPPORT FOR HONORABLE MAN IN VERY DIFFICULT POSITION, AND ALL WE KNOW

OF HONESTY, LOYALTY, AND PERSONAL RELATIONS OF GHASHMI  
WITH HAMDI WARS AGAINST THEORY OF TREACHERY ON HIS PART.  
HAMDI WAS OFTEN INDIFFERENT TO SECURITY, SOMETIMES  
EVEN DRIVING HIS OWN VW AROUND SANA ALONE.

5. THIRD THEORY

L IS THAT TRIBES ENGINEERED KILLING. MEN  
LIKE ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN ARE CLEARLY NOT HAPPY WITH DEAL  
WHICH SAUDIS HAVE HELPED HAMDI IMPOSE ON HIM. THEY COULD  
BE REACHING FOR BIGGER STAKES, REGARDLESS OF SAUDI ANGER.  
GHASHMI SUGGESTED SINAN ABU LUHUM, BUT LIKE ABDAL  
AZIZ, HE PROFESSED TOTAL UNCERTAINTY.

6. SO FAR YEMENIS WHO HAVE MENTIONED THIS HAVE DONE SO VERY  
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TENTATIVELY, USUALLY SAYING THAT MURDER APPEARS TO HAVE  
BEEN ANOTHER PROFESSIONAL JOB OF SORT THAT TOOK LIFE OF  
HAJRI. IF IT REQUIRED SPLIT-SECOND TIMING, GOOD INTELLIGENCE,  
CLEAN GET-AWAY, TRIBES DON'T HAVE NECESSARY SKILLS.

7. THAT LEAVES SOUTH YEMEN. SALIM RUBAYYA ALI HAS CANCELLED  
ALL OCTOBER 14 CELEBRATIONS AND SENT MININT SALIH MUSLIH  
TO REPRESENT HIS GRIEF-STRICKEN "PROVINCE" OF "UNITED"  
YEMEN. FEW TRUST SINCERITY OF SUCH GESTURES. MEN LIKE  
SECURITY CHIEF MOHAMMAD KHAMIS AND MINISTER OF STATE  
AHMAD ABDU SAID ACTUALLY SEE INVITATION FOR HAMDI  
TO MAKE STATE VISIT IN TWO DAYS TO ADEN IN CONNECTION  
WITH OCTOBER 14 AS A SUPREME RUSE. THEY, OF COURSE,  
BELIEVE THAT SOUTH ENGINEERED KILLING OF HAJRI, AND  
THEY ARE RIGHT. MAFIA SKILLS OF MURDER POINT TO SOUTH  
ACTING AGAIN, PROBABLY AFTER HAJRI KILLING DID NOT  
HAVE DESIRED EFFECT OF WARNING HAMDI OFF OF FURTHER  
RAPPROCHEMENT WITH SAUDIS AND SACRIFICE OF LEFTIST  
INTERESTS FOR TRADITIONALIST ONES IN INTERNAL YEMENI  
POLITICS. SOUTH PROBABLY FEARED GROWING STRENGTH OF  
SAUDIS VERSUS SOVIETS IN YEMEN, GROWING STRENGTH OF  
HAMDI VERSUS ALL OTHERS HERE. HAMDI WAS, AFTER ALL,  
IN FINAL STAGES OF IMPLEMENTING AGREEMENT WHICH WOULD  
GIVE CENTRL GOVERNMENT EXTRAORDINARY NEW STRENGTH VIS-  
A-VIS TRIBES

1. WE STRESS THAT IT IS STILL MUCH TOO EARLY  
FOR EVIDENCE TO SURFACE AND OPINION HERE TO  
COALESCE. WE TEND TO SEE SOUTH YEMENI HAND IN  
THIS AFFAIR, BUT CAN HARDLY PROVE IT.

9. EFFECTS OF ASSASSINATION ARE JUST AS HARD TO  
DISCUSS WITH CONFIDENCE AS POSSIBLE PERPETRATORS.  
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KILLING HAS OPENED A GAPING HOLE IN POLITICS OF THIS COUNTRY. HAMDY HELD TOGETHER COMMAND COUNCIL, WHICH INCLUDED TWO POTENTIALLY WARRING FIGURES LIKE NORTHERN AND SHAYKHLY AL-GHASHMI AND SOUTHERN AND CLASSLESS ABDULLAH ABDAL ALIM. PRIME MINISTER, WHILE BRILLIANT TECHNOCRAT, IS FORCELESS

MAN WHO HAS NO POLITICAL POWER BASE OUTSIDE SMALL GROUP OF MODERNIZERS. POSSIBILITIES THAT ABDALLAH BIN HUSAYN WILL INJECT HIMSELF INTO UNCERTAIN SITUATION WITH TRIAL LEVIES ARE REAL. THE UNKNOWN LIEUTENANT COLONEL, WHO CAN MOVE THE CRUCIAL MILITARY UNIT INTO THE HEADQUARTERS AND RADIO STATION, COULD ALSO BRING ABOUT CONFLICT AT EARLY DATE. HAMDY'S STRENGTH, OF COURSE, WAS IN PART THAT HE HAD ELIMINATED MOST OF HIS RIVALS FROM SCENE BUT THIS COULD EASILY PROVE TO BE FATAL WEAKNESS OF HIS SUCCESSORS, WHO WILL BE LOOKING FOR SUPPORT FROM ALL SIDES.

10. NEVERTHELESS, WE WANT TO GO OUT ON LIMB TO NOTE THAT TRANSITION HAS BEEN SMOOTH AND REASSURING TO DATE  
O GHASHMIN WITH WHOM  
EMBASSY HAS HAD CLOSE RELATIONS, HAS BEEN UNUSUALLY POLISHED AND AUTHORITATIVE IN CRISIS AND ALONE AT HELM. WE THINK IN SHORT RUN HE WILL SUPPRESS ANY RIVALRY WITH ABDALLAH ABDAL ALIM AND LEAN HEAVILY FOR ADVICE FROM ABD AL-AZIZ. HIS QUICK AND FIRM REASSURANCE THAT YAR POLICIES WILL NOT CHANGE IS CODE WHICH WE CAN READ AS GOOD FOR OUR INTERESTS HERE. IT MEANS TILT TOWARD SAUDIS AND AWAY FROM SOVIETS WILL CONTINUE. THIS IS OF COURSE OUR PRIMARY CONCERN IN YEMEN.

11. CRUCIAL TEST WILL COME WHEN MOURNING PERIOD, WITH ITS FUNERALS AND DELEGATIONS, WINDS TO CLOSE.

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GHASHMI MIGHT WELL REACH FOR APPEARANCE OF COLLEGIALITY. NUMEROUS POLITICIANS -- MAYBE EVEN SOMEONE LIKE ABD AL RAHMAN AL IRYNAI -- MAY RETURN IN EFFORT BY GHASHMI TO BUTTRESS HIS NEW POSITION. PULLING AND HAULING AMONG THIS GROUP SHOULD START IN ABOUT TEN DAYS TO TWO WEEKS AND TEST CHARACTER AND SKILLS OF GHASHMI.

12. NEVERTHELESS, IN BAD SITUATION, GHASHMI IS OFF TO GOOD START AND AMBASSADOR TOLD HIM AND PRIME MINISTER IN SECOND MEETING THIS EVENING THAT WE SAW THEM AS BEST GUARANTEES OF STABILITY AND MODERNIZATION OF YEMEN AND WOULD SUPPORT THEM TO EXTENT WE COULD. AMBASSADOR ALSO SAID HE WAS CERTAIN SAUDIS WOULD DO SO ALSO AND URGED NEW LEADERS TO WORK WITH SAUDIS FOR COMMON INTERESTS. BOTH MEN EXPRESSED DEEP APPRECIATION FOR US SUPPORT WHILE STATING INTENTION TO MAINTAIN CLOSE TIES WITH SAUDIS.

13. AMERICAN COMMUNITY HAS BEEN ORGANIZED UNDER EMBASSY WARDEN SYSTEM AND EMBASSY PERSONNEL HAVE LEFT TO REASSURE AMERICANS IN TAIZ AND HODEIDA. WE DON'T EXPECT TROUBLE AND COMMUNITY IS NOT ANXIOUS BUT WE ARE READY IF NECESSARY.  
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